

**Reading LRA
Public Meeting
Wednesday, January 28, 2009
7th Day Adventist Church
7:00 p.m.**

Committee Members Attending: V. Spencer, S. Marmarou, P. Coles, E. Rafaelli, J. Knockstead, M. Ballas, S. Fuhs, W. Dennis (ad hoc)

Staff attending: L. Kelleher, Point of Contact; Swiger Consulting Group - Mr. Flynn; Mr. Steinberg; C. Deller; K. Graybill

Others Attending: F. Vecchio - Reading School District, C. Folk - Mary's Shelter, M. Bernosky - Berks Women in Crisis (BWIC)

Note: The Reading LRA completed an aggressive outreach campaign to publicize this meeting. An article announcing the meeting appeared in the Reading Eagle, followed by a flyer mailed to 3000 surrounding properties and display advertisements in the Reading Eagle on Sunday, January 25th, Tuesday, January 27th and Wednesday, January 28th. Copies of the advertisement and flyer are posted on the LRA webpage. On Wednesday, January 28th the Reading area experienced a winter weather event and the Council Office fielded approximately 50 calls and e mails inquiring about the meeting between 8 a.m. and 11 a.m. The Council Office asked local radio stations to announce that the meeting was not postponed and the local television news station ran a story about the meeting at 5:30 p.m.

Mr. Flynn, Thomas Point Associates, representing the Swiger Consulting Group welcomed everyone to the meeting. He noted the great neighborhood attendance, despite the weather. He introduced the members of the Reading LRA. He introduced Ms. Kelleher, the director of the LRA project, who is responsible for coordinating the work flow and communication between the consultants, the Reading LRA and the public.

Mr. Flynn introduced Mr. Steinberg, Esquire, - Kutok Rock, and Mr. Deller and Mr. Graybill – C.S. Davidson, Inc., members of the Swiger Consulting Group. He

explained that the group was convened by Dr. Ernie Swiger - Swiger Consulting. He stated that Dr. Swiger was unable to attend due to a conflicting appointment. The Reading LRA obtained a grant from the Department of Defense (DoD) to cover the cost of the consulting group, retained at the beginning of January 2009.

Mr. Flynn explained that the Swiger consulting group, representing various fields of expertise such as environmental, legal, economic development, transportation, mechanicals, etc, was retained by the Reading LRA to assist them with the preparation of the reuse plan for the Navy Marine Center, located in the 600 block of Kenhorst Blvd. He noted that each member of the group has had experience with BRAC (Base Realignment and Closure) properties.

Mr. Flynn explained the BRAC process coordinated by the DoD. He stated that after a defense property is decommissioned by the federal government, the military resident has six years to relocate. This property was decommissioned in 2005. The County undertook the LRA process and submitted a NOI (Notice of Interest) for a communications center but later found that using another facility would be more economical due to the cost of retrofitting the existing building and curing the environmental issues. The City then decided to succeed the County LRA. The Reading LRA was approved by the DoD in May 2008. The Reading LRA does not need to redo the work completed by the County LRA but can pick up where the County left off. This process must be completed by April 2009. He explained that the transfer from the County to the City caused a 6-9 month delay. He added that although the Reading LRA must complete their work by April 2009, the Marines are not expected to relocate until their new facility in the Allentown area is completed late in 2010. He stated that it is likely that the relocation of the Marines may be extended further. He stated that the Reading LRA may request a three month extension from the DoD.

Mr. Flynn stated that the consulting group will study the building, the area and consider the Notices of Interest (NOI), along with the input from the residents of the surrounding neighborhood. A recommendation will be made to the Reading LRA. A second public meeting to present the draft plan will be scheduled around the beginning of April. Residents will again be asked to provide comment on the draft plan before it is finalized, either with or without amendment and presented to the DoD and HUD, who will ultimately approve the final reuse plan.

Mr. Flynn stated that he had a brief tour of the building today. He explained that the seven acre parcel currently has a main building with offices, classrooms,

training areas and meeting rooms. The parcel also contains out buildings and surface parking lots. He stated that there is a main electric transmission line, running through the west side of the parcel that serves some Baldwin Brass and other facilities.

Mr. Flynn stated that the Reading LRA has received NOIs from three groups:

- Reading Hospital - administration buildings
- Reading School District - kindergarten cottages and storage facility
- Mary's Shelter & BWIC - joint proposal for shelter and transitional housing

Mr. Flynn explained that these are not the only uses that will be considered. The Reading LRA will need to consider the compatibility and impact the proposed use will have on the surrounding neighborhood and the input from the residents of this area before a reuse plan is finalized.

Mr. Steinberg noted the need for the Reading LRA to consider the environmental concerns that come along with the property. The CERFA (Community Environmental Response Facilitation Act) report completed by the DoD shows the existence of radon, lead (paint and ammunition remains) and asbestos. These environmental issues will impact the use selected as the group taking possession of the building will have to undertake remediation. He stated that the Reading LRA will have to consider the ability of the party taking possession of the property to have the financial resources to complete the remediation issues. He added that the lead contamination may preclude the Reading LRA from allowing a use that would increase the exposure to children. He stressed the detrimental effects lead contamination has on children.

In response to a question from the public, Mr. Steinberg explained that the federal government does not always provide or fund remediation. He also noted that the federal government does not have to adhere to local codes, building and trades regulations. In addition to remediation, the new owner will also have to bring the building up to local standards. He stressed the need for all potential owners to consider the unknown costs of environmental remediation and bringing the building into compliance with local building and codes regulations.

Mr. Flynn noted the need for the people in the surrounding neighborhoods to provide input on the NOIs and suggest other reuse ideas for the parcel. He asked all present to indicate their desire to speak by raising their hand, then when called upon to stand and state their name. He opened the floor for

comment.

Jack Crawford, of Pershing Blvd, stated that he has resided on Pershing Blvd. for many years and worked as a West Reading Police Officer. He expressed the belief that the parcel should be used for governmental purposes. He suggested that the City move its police and fire operations to this site. He stated that the buildings are well suited for quasi military use. He stated that currently the Reading Police Department is spread over three floors in City Hall. He noted the severe security issues this current layout presents to City Hall and its employees. He stated that this parcel could also be used to hold the fire station originally proposed for Lancaster Avenue, as the existing garages could be used in their current condition to house fire apparatus. He stated that moving these public safety entities to this site would dramatically improve departmental operational efficiencies.

Robert Berns stated that he and his colleagues are representing the Russell Butterweck Marine Corp League. He read a letter drafted to the Reading LRA requesting the retention of meeting and storage space in the building. He stated that the Marine Corp League has been meeting in the building since 1984. The group meets on the 2nd Tuesday of each month from 7 - 9:30 p.m. He described the mission of the group and their community outreach efforts, such as Toys for Tots. In response to a question, Mr. Berns stated that approximately 40-45 of the 160 members attend the monthly meetings.

Carlos Zayas, of South 11th Street, expressed the belief that this project is 2 1/2 years behind schedule. He stated that he and Valentin Rodriguez submitted a petition containing 160 signatures requesting that the building be used for a joint city-county use. He suggested that the City consider relocating the Reading Police Academy to this site. He noted his agreement with the suggestion to relocate the City's police and fire departments to this site. He also suggested that the Reading LRA consider the City's Comprehensive Plan before committing to a reuse plan. He expressed the belief that the composition of the current Reading LRA may violate federal regulations. He suggested improved communications and explained the Citizens Participation section of the City's Charter.

Mr. Steinberg stated that Mr. Zayas' comments cover two areas: 1) the composition of the Reading LRA and the potential for conflict with federal regulations and 2) the reuse of the building. He explained that only the reuse of the site can be considered at this time.

Mr. Spencer provided background information on the City's decision to take on the LRA process. He stated that several meetings with the OEA (Office of Economic Adjustment) Project Manager about the composition of the Reading LRA and the BRAC process occurred. The composition of the LRA board falls under BRAC regulations. He stated that the current members were selected due to their skills, community involvement and knowledge. He stated that due to the tight timeline the City needed to seek members who understand planning, redevelopment and City issues. The Reading LRA's current composition meets those needs and includes citizens at large who represent the Homeless Coalition.

Mr. Spencer explained while Chief Heim submitted an NOI for a police academy to the County LRA, that NOI was withdrawn. He stated that the current arrangement with Alvernia more than meets the needs of the Reading Police Academy, as it works with Alvernia's criminal justice program and allows the Academy to utilize Alvernia's physical education facilities. Alvernia is also in close proximity to the new location of the outdoor firing range.

Stuart Kennedy, of Farr Place, questioned how the reuse applications are weighed. Mr. Steinberg explained that when a facility like this is decommissioned military reuse is considered first, followed by federal reuse, then public conveyance. If none of these uses are suitable, then private reuse is considered. He explained that currently the Reading LRA has two NOIs for public conveyance (Reading Hospital and Reading School District) and one use that would benefit the homeless (BWIC and Mary's shelter joint application).

Mr. Kennedy stated that he is the area Magisterial District Justice and as the County does not provide court/office space he needs to lease space in this area. He stated that he would have considered operating his courtroom/office at this facility. He also expressed support for the Reading School District's proposed use. If the Reading Hospital's proposed reuse is accepted, he suggested including a VA medical component.

Mr. Flynn stated that he will discuss all suggestions with the appropriate parties.

A resident suggested that the County consider moving the County Probation office to this site. Mr. Dennis stated that during the County's LRA process County officials considered relocating several offices and service areas to this site but after considering the cost of remediation and cost of bringing the building up to current code regulations, the County decided against taking the property. He

stated that he will discuss this suggestion with the Commissioners again. He noted that the service area with the largest space problem is the County court system.

Jeff Palmer, Executive Director of Olivet's Boys and Girls Club, stated that the Olivet's facility neighbors the reserve facility. He expressed interest in a shared use of the facility, as the Olivet's facility has outgrown its current site. He stated that the Olivet's is not interested in managing the entire site but would be interested in sharing the facility.

Allen Bergum, of Kenhorst Blvd., stated that he has resided in this area for 50 years. He stated that before the installation of the parking lots and out buildings neighborhood children played on the parcel's grassy lot. He noted the lack of public open space in this area. He suggested using a portion of this parcel for a public park, play area or swimming pool. He noted the great distance between this neighborhood and the City's Schlegel Park swimming pool. He added that this area is in close proximity to the West Reading swimming pool but Reading residents are not permitted to use the pool unless they are accompanied by a West Reading citizen.

Mr. Flynn inquired if Margaret Street ever ran through this parcel. Mr. Bergum stated that Margaret Street was always divided by this parcel. Mr. Flynn inquired if there was a stream on site. Mr. Marmarou stated that a stream ran on the perimeter of the property. He added that this grassy area was home to the first little league baseball association.

Mr. Flynn and Mr. Steinberg invited BWIC and Mary's Shelter to introduce their proposed use.

Christine Folk, Executive Director of Mary's Shelter, stated that her organization submitted a joint application with BWIC. She explained that Mary's Shelter provides transitional housing and support services to pregnant teenage girls. She stated that their organization currently operates from a home on Upland Avenue, near Alvernia. She stated that her organization also helps young women find permanent housing after their babies are born. She added that in recent years young pregnant women who return to their facility are seeking services and support for themselves and their children. Due to space limitations many are turned away. She stated that the main building would be retrofitted to provide temporary housing to clients of Mary's Shelter and BWIC.

Mr. Flynn asked Ms. Folk how many people their program currently serves. Ms. Folk stated that 45 young women (and their babies) and 300 families are currently served in their 2 Reading based facilities. She stated that as 46% of the clients have a history of abuse, they decided to submit a joint application with BWIC.

Mr. Flynn inquired if the proposed joint use would use the entire parcel. Ms. Folk stated that they intend to use only a portion of the parcel. She explained the convenience of the site for the individuals served.

Mary Kay Bernosky, Executive Director of BWIC, agreed with the statement of Ms. Folk. She stated that BWIC provides comprehensive services to those who have experienced abusive relationships. BWIC provides shelter for 30 days. Clients are then moved into bridge/transitional housing for 90-180 days. She explained the comprehensive services offered to clients. BWIC's current Reading based facilities provide services to 26 women and children. She noted that approximately 200 people have been denied shelter due to space limitations.

Ms. Bernosky stated that the joint NOI can be viewed on the LRA webpage. Ms. Kelleher stated that the LRA has been advised not to upload the NOIs onto the webpage, as the NOIs represent contracts under negotiation. Mr. Steinberg stated that the NOIs can be posted if those submitting the NOIs consent to have them publicly posted.

Mr. Steinburg noted the problems with using the existing main building for living space. He again stated that the existing lead contamination poses severe problems for children. He stated that the federal government's current acceptable lead levels of 400 parts per million is going to be reduced. He stated that remediation of lead, asbestos and radon will be expensive. He noted the difficulties with funding environmental remediation and retrofitting the building for living purposes.

Mr. Steinberg explained that the BRAC properties are transferred "as is, where is". He added that at times deed restrictions are placed on the building. Mr. Flynn stated that the consultants will provide a report containing some detail on the condition of the mechanicals. Mr. Steinberg stated that as funding has not been provided for environmental testing, an "at risk" assumption will be used based on the CERFA report from the Navy. He noted that the Reading LRA could apply to the OEA for funding to perform environmental testing.

Mr. Steinberg stated that in this 5th round of decommissioned BRAC properties each property has been found to have environmental issues. He stated that generally if remediation has not occurred, deed restrictions occur.

Several residents expressed concern that the federal government would not remediate the property prior to transfer. Mr. Steinberg stated that if the parcel is not transferred "as is", the property will either be auctioned off or land-banked until something causes redevelopment to occur. Generally these land-banked properties fall into disrepair and become white elephants, driving the surrounding property values down. Ms. Kelleher noted that the Armory Building on Exeter Street in Reading was a perfect example of a decommissioned property land-banked by the federal government.

Mr. Steinberg also noted the usual lack of "as built" drawings and other plans that accompany military properties. He explained that as military properties are not subject to local regulations, improvements and utilities are installed without oversight or planning. He stated that it is not unusual for a receiving party to find underground tanks, misplaced sewer lines etc.

There was a discussion on the history of the parcel and the prior use of outdoor and indoor firing ranges.

Barbara Crawford, of Pershing Blvd, stated that she would welcome the Reading Hospital use if the Reading Police Department does not want the property. She stated that the Reading Hospital has been a good neighbor for many years. She also stated that the Reading Hospital's meticulous care for their facilities and grounds would definitely have a positive impact on the surrounding residential properties. She stated that she would not accept any type of homeless use in this neighborhood.

Claudine Jenkins, of Pershing Blvd, agreed with the statement made by Mrs. Crawford. She stated that allowing a homeless use would detrimentally affect the quality of life in this neighborhood. She noted that a homeless facility would not be compatible with this low density residential area. She stated that the Marines have been good neighbors, often offering assistance to people in the surrounding neighborhood.

Joan Moyer, of Pershing Blvd, agreed with the statements of Mrs. Crawford and Mrs. Jenkins. She asked that the Reading LRA consider only reuses that will help property owners retain or improve property values and support the quality of life in the neighborhood.

Mr. McTammany, of Pershing Blvd, explained that Hummingbird Hill is not an apartment building but is an 84 unit condominium. He stated that these condos are owned, not rented, which contributes to the current good quality of life in this area.

John Taylor, of Pershing Blvd, stated that he is President of the Condo Council. Concerns about the continued good quality of life and public safety have been expressed at Condo Council Meetings. He stated that traffic problems are already present and the owners of the Hummingbird Condos are also concerned that an improper reuse could increase traffic problems. Mr. Flynn explained that the consultant team includes an expert in the traffic area, who will provide input on traffic, street noise, etc.

Mr. Flynn asked the group if anyone knew when the off street parking lots were added to the Navy Marine Center. Mr. Bergum and Mr. Crawford stated that the parking lots were installed when the reserve and drill training started at the facility.

Mr. Flynn stated that as this parcel is seven (7) acres, it could support more than one use. He noted that the existing building could also be demolished. He stated that when studying the potential reuses the consultant group will consider the topography of the parcel and the impact a future use will have on the surrounding neighborhood.

Mr. Vecchio, from the Reading School District, questioned the amount of on site parking. Mr. Graybill and Flynn estimated that there is about 2 acres of surface parking available.

Ms. Folk invited all present to visit the Mary's Shelter facility on Upland Avenue.

Ms. Kelleher suggested that everyone visit the LRA webpage on the City's website - ReadingPA.gov to learn more about the reports referenced tonight, along with other educational information on the BRAC process are on the page.

Mr. Flynn thanked all present for attending and participating. He stated that excellent points were raised at this meeting. He reminded everyone that another meeting will be held around the beginning of April. He encouraged all to stay involved in this process.

As no further business was brought forward, the public meeting was adjourned.

The following e mail from a resident of the surrounding neighborhood was received on January 28th:

-----Original Message-----

From: Maureen Ficken [mailto:ssdmmf@yahoo.com]

Sent: Wed 1/28/2009 5:59 PM

To: Council

Cc:

Subject: reuse of Navy Marine Center of Kenhorst

Good Evening,

I had planned on going to the meeting tonight 1/28/09, I will not be attending due to driving conditions this eve. I would just like to go on record that I do not think a womens/childrens homeless shelter/services center is a correct usage for this property. This location would be better served as low traffic/low visitation office space in a county/state usage. thanks Maureen Ficken

The following Phone call was fielded by Ms. Kelleher on Thursday, January 29th at 8:30 a.m.:

Amelia Biancone, of McArthur Ave., suggested that the Police and Fire Departments relocate operations to this site. She also suggested that the fire house planned for Lancaster Avenue be moved to this location.

*Respectfully submitted by
Linda A. Kelleher CMC, City Clerk
Thomas Flynn, Thomas Point Associates*